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WHAT HIGHER CRITICISM IS NOT.

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Higher criticism not destructive rationalism—As old as Christianity, and practised in modern times by scholars of all schools—Its province is to find truth, not to destroy it—Its problems not to be settled by authority, or by epithets—The date and authorship of Isaiah, chaps. 40–66, as an illustration—The name of the science may be changed; the work will go on.

THE simple purpose of this article is to affirm that “higher criticism,” properly so called in distinction from “lower criticism,” is not destructive rationalism. This kind of criticism is as old as Christianity. Its aim is to ascertain the truth, the whole truth so far as it may be known, and nothing but the truth, concerning the dates, authorship, and contents of the several books of the Bible. Whether the Pentateuch be the work of a single author, or a compilation of many documents; whether or no Zechariah, chs. 9–14, be from a hand different from that which wrote Zechariah, chs. 1–8; whether the Epistle to the Hebrews be a work of Paul or Apollos, or Barnabas, or Luke; the advocates of the various hypotheses are all alike “higher critics.” Eusebius tells us that many in his day had questioned the authorship of Hebrews, and James, and Second Peter, and Jude, and the Revelation of John. Porphyry assailed the genuineness of Daniel, and Jerome defended it, and both of them in that particular discussion were higher critics. So, too, in modern times Neander and Hengstenberg distinguished themselves in higher criticism as truly as did Strauss and Ewald. The fact that these critics arrived at different results ought not to lay the word “criticism” under ban.

The results of criticism, as well as its methods of procedure, are matters of personal opinion. When a writer gives us a fair statement of his reasons for adopting a certain hypothesis, we are bound in all honor to treat him respectfully. We may differ

from him at many points, and reach a very opposite conclusion. We may discover in his method of argument that which is one-sided and misleading. It is the province of higher criticism to detect fallacies, to point out errors, to correct mistakes; not to tear down and destroy the truth.

It seems to be the infirmity and misfortune of some minds to suppose that the questions of biblical criticism can be settled by authority. Others are given to using opprobrious epithets against those who see good reason to depart from traditional views of the date and authorship of some portions of the Bible. To deny the Davidic authorship of certain Psalms has been pronounced revolutionary. We write in protest of this kind of dogmatism, and maintain that, while some critics have reached results which we regret, higher criticism is not necessarily destructive criticism.

In illustration of our meaning we glance briefly at the old question of the date and authorship of Isaiah, chs. 40-66. How these chapters came to be attached to the book of Isaiah, no man may now be able to explain. But does it therefore necessarily follow that they must be the work of the son of Amoz? It is conceivable that in the arrangement of the Old Testament canon after the exile, there may have been at first five books of Isaiah (*e. g.*, Isa. chs. 1-12, 13-23, 24-35, 36-39 and 40-66), as well as five books of Moses, and five books of David (the Psalms). And while this is only a conjecture, it may suggest how a compilation might have come to bear the name of one great person without being his sole composition.

But the thoughtful reader finds three classes of passages in this "Later Isaiah" which are difficult to adjust to the view that they were written by Isaiah, the son of Amoz:

1. In Isa. 43:14; 46:1; 47:1-7; 48:14-20, Babylon is mentioned in a manner very unnatural for a writer living more than a hundred years before the Babylonian exile.

2. Isa. 42:22-25; 44:26-28; 52:2-11; 63:18; 64:9-11, naturally imply that, at the time of the writer, the Jewish people were in exile, Judah was a desolation, and Jerusalem and the temple were in ruins.

There are other passages which mention or refer to Cyrus as a well-known conqueror. In 41:2, 25; 45:13; 46:11 he is referred to as one so well known as not to need naming in order to be recognized; and in 44:28 and 45:1-4 he is explicitly named and titled.

These three classes of passages resolve themselves into one united testimony to show that the date of the writing is the latter part of the period of Babylonian exile. Had these twenty-six chapters appeared as a separate book, without name or title, no critic would seriously have thought of ascribing it to a writer living in the Assyrian period, and in the days of Isaiah. The desolation of Judah and Jerusalem is not predicted as something yet to be, but assumed as already existing. The mention of Cyrus by name, and the manner in which he is repeatedly referred to, would be very unnatural in a prophet writing more than a century before that conquerer appeared. He is first referred to without mention of his name (41:2, 25), and is throughout spoken of as one who had already taken his place upon the stage of action. He is marching on to conquest, as a chosen vessel of Jehovah. "I have called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (45:4). That is, Jehovah had called him by his name Cyrus, as in 44:28, and entitled him his "shepherd," and his "anointed." Cyrus did not know or worship Jehovah, but he was employed as his agent to say of Jerusalem "Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."

Whether one be convinced by these considerations that the "Later Isaiah" belongs to the time of exile or not, any fair-minded critic must see and feel the force of the argument for that date, built upon the passages referred to. But I have read one or two discussions of this subject by writers who confound higher criticism with destructive rationalism, and instead of finding the issue squarely met, I observed that they passed over all these passages in a flippant manner, and then presumed to prove the author of Isaiah 62:4 to be contemporary with King Hezekiah because of his use of the word *Hephzibah*, which was the name of Hezekiah's wife (2 Kings 21:1)! A reader of the

Hebrew text would wonder why the symbolical name *Hephzibah* should prove more on this subject than *Azubah*, and *Shemamah*, and *Beulah*, which occur in the same verse!

It is possible that the misuse and abuse of the term "higher criticism" may lead to the adoption of another word as a substitute for it. Some writers of distinction are already employing such phrases as "biblical criticism," and "historical research." But whatever may become of the name "higher criticism," its age-long work will go right on. Its mission is not to destroy, but to fulfil. Its only aim is to put all things to the test, and hold fast that which is good.